

AFRICAN EMBASSY BOMBINGS

Situation: Embassy employees die after being drawn to the sound of gunfire and an explosion.

On August 7, 1998, two almost simultaneous explosions nearly destroyed the US embassies 420 miles apart in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. The vehicle-borne explosives, detonated outside the embassies' perimeters, killed over 230 people, including 12 Americans, and wounded more than 5,000.

These events demonstrated the ability of terrorists to execute carefully planned operations and strike at any time and place. Fortunately, embassy security personnel at both locations kept the terrorist vehicles from entering the perimeter. However, in Nairobi, the conflict between the terrorists and guards at the gate drew people to their windows out of curiosity. Moments later, when the car bomb exploded many of these people were killed or injured by flying glass and debris.



Your best defense is to avoid unnecessary danger. If you believe a terrorist attack may be in progress, do not go towards the incident. Get yourself and others to safety.



Prior to the August 7 attacks, Nairobi had been designated as a "medium" threat post. There were no specific threats against the embassy in the days before the attack, but earlier reports cited threats against a number of US diplomatic missions to include the embassy in Nairobi. These threats were largely discounted because of their nonspecific nature.

Overall, the embassy in Nairobi met most of the State Department's security standards.

However, it did not have the required standoff distance of 100-feet from the street. The embassy had been in operation at one of the busiest intersections in Nairobi since the early 1980s, before the standoff requirement was developed. Over the years, embassy staff had unsuccessfully attempted to gain control over additional areas to increase standoff from public areas.

Be alert to general changes in the threat environment. Take threats seriously, even if they are not specific.

At approximately 10:30 A.M. in Nairobi, terrorists approached an exit lane at the rear of the embassy compound. Security guards had just closed the perimeter gate after a mail truck departed and the terrorists demanded it be reopened. When the guards refused, the terrorists began shooting and threw a flash grenade.

The sounds of gunfire and the exploding grenade drew embassy employees to their windows. Moments later, when the vehicle exploded, the people that gathered at the windows were showered with flying glass and debris resulting in the majority of deaths and injuries of embassy personnel.



React quickly in a dangerous situation. If you hear gunfire or explosions, drop to the ground or find a place to take cover.

In addition to the damage and casualties at the US embassy, the explosion destroyed or damaged several surrounding buildings. In addition to killing 12 US citizens and 247 Kenyans, including 32 embassy employees, the blast injured six US citizens and approximately 5,000 Kenyans, including 13 embassy employees. The near-simultaneous attack in Tanzania took the life of 10 Tanzanians, including 7 embassy employees, and injured one US citizen and 76 Tanzanians.



Investigations by the US FBI and Kenyan and Tanzanian authorities concluded that Osama Bin Laden and the al-Qaeda network were responsible for coordinating and carrying out the attacks. Of 22 individuals under US indictment for the attacks, four were convicted by a New York jury and given life sentences in 2001, five more are in US or foreign custody, and 13 remain at large.